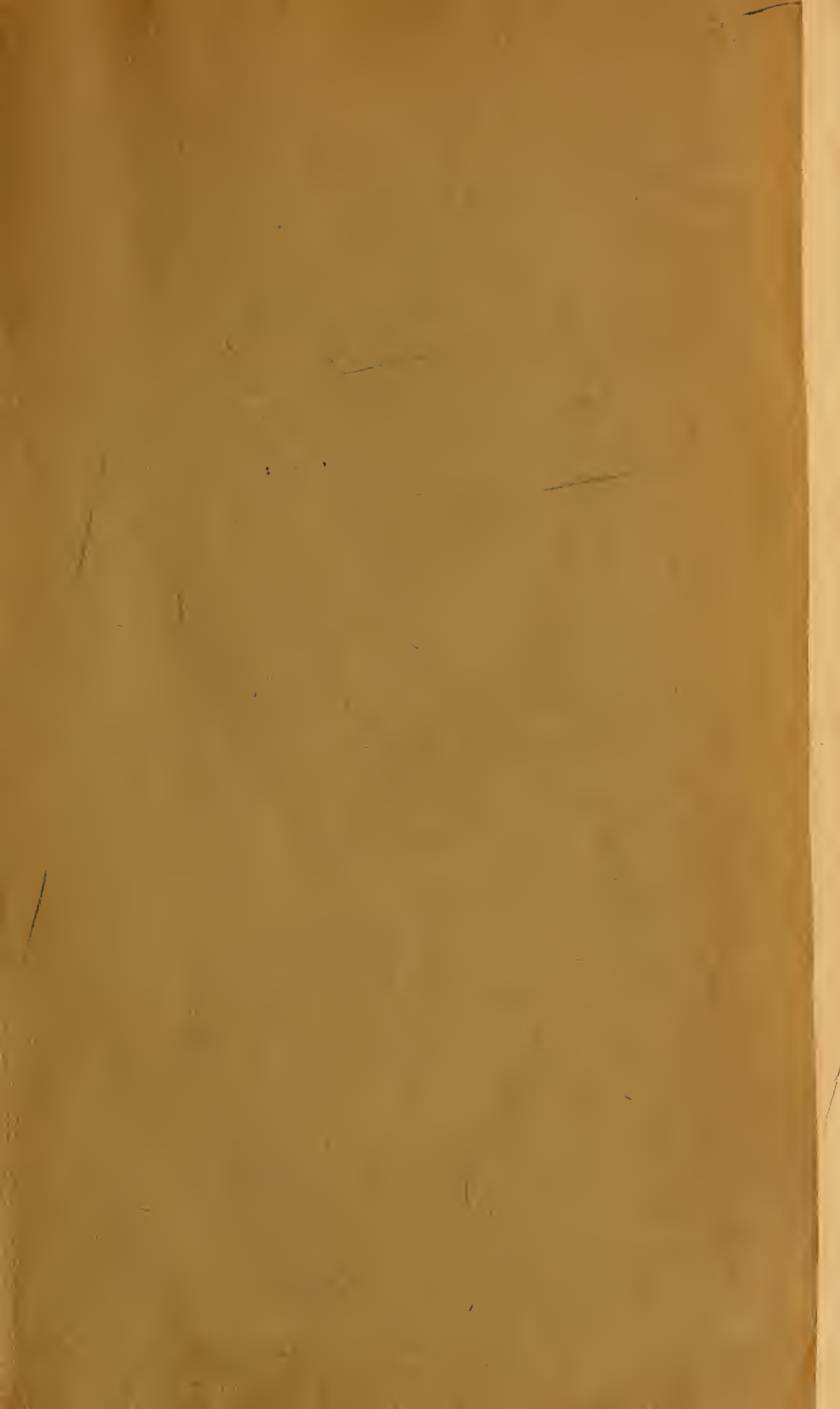
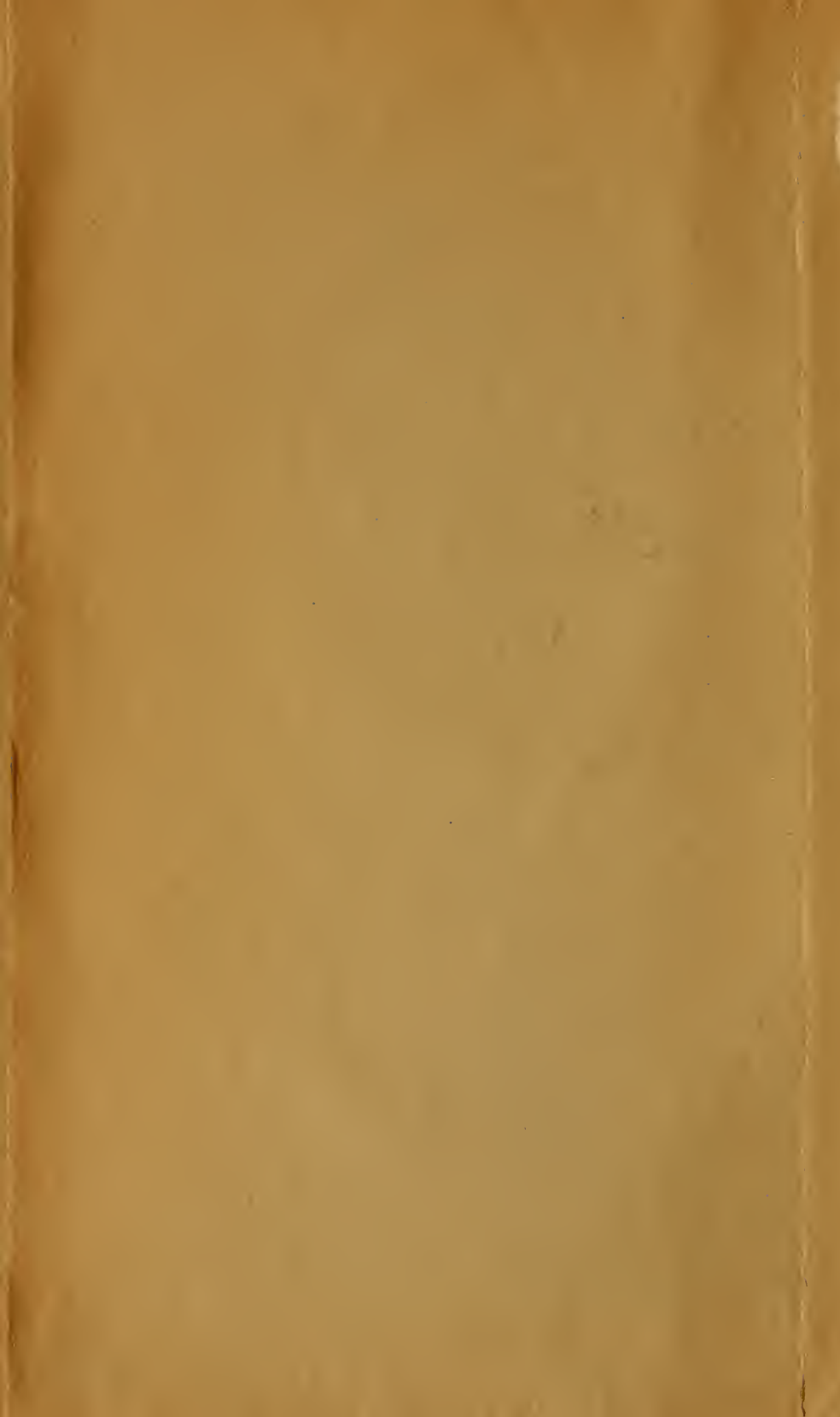




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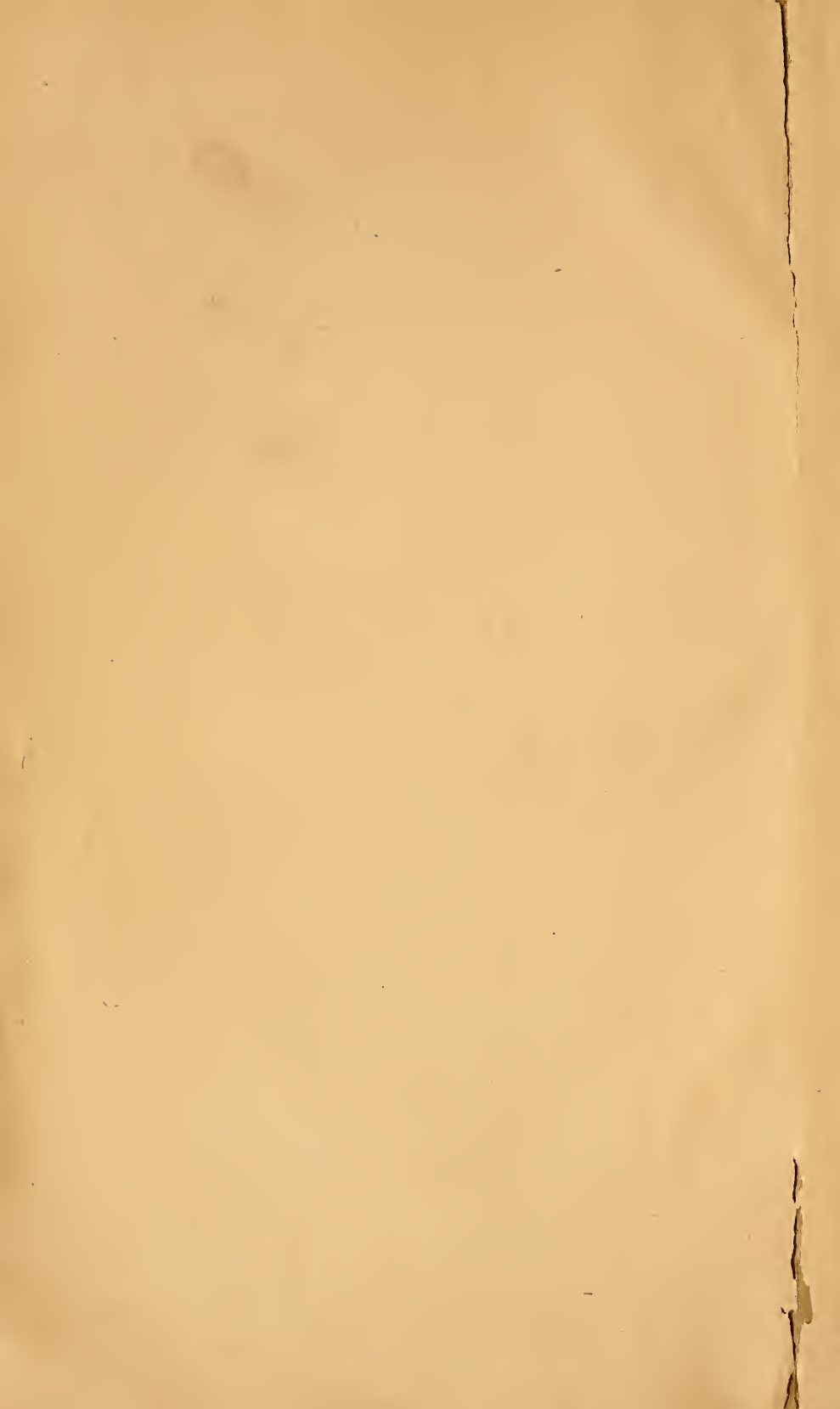
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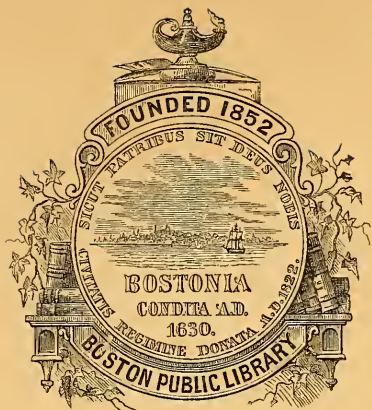
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*The devil,*

*By*

*Wm. R. Alger.*

*Ch. Examiner.*



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THE

# CHRISTIAN EXAMINER.

SEPTEMBER, 1861.

ART. I.—THE THEORY OF A PERSONAL DEVIL.

*The Mystery: or, Evil and God.* By JOHN YOUNG, LL. D. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co. 1856.

WE are unable to attribute any high merit to Dr. Young's book. We cannot perceive that he manipulates the mysterious problem into any more intelligible or less distressing form than it had when he approached it. He presents the ordinary considerations in the trite methods, without a spark of striking originality, power, or beauty. It is wearisome and unprofitable work. That portion of his volume in which he considers "physical and moral evil in the light of reason," is healthy, full of common sense, in accordance with science and philosophy, though its subject-matter is repeated here as it has been a hundred times before. But the portion where he considers "physical and moral evil in the brighter light of revelation" totally reverses the spirit and conclusions of the preceding part, and exhibits a painful abnegation of reason in abject submission to the authority of tradition.

In calling attention to the theory of a personal Devil, we desire to look fairly at the facts in the case, to seek their true explanation, and ascertain what import they have for us.

The fact that most broadly confronts us in the outset is the numerous varieties of form in which the belief in a personal Devil has appeared, and the remarkable extent to which it has prevailed in the world. The Egyptian Typhon, who dried up the Nile and blasted the fertile country with his breath; the

Iranian Ahriman, author of blackness and filth; the Scandinavian Loki, concentration of mischief and malignity; the Mohammedan Eblis, who, refusing through pride to obey Allah, became the king of hell and the arch-enemy of the human race; the Israelitish Satan, lying serpent, who compassed the fall of the primal pair, and is the indefatigable contriver of sin and woe; the Christian Devil, dread antagonist of God, compacted of guile and hate, who, impersonating no exclusive nationality, in the diffusion of his believers through many countries has taken a tinge from every creed, and a trait from each of his predecessors and counterparts in the pagan faiths, while preserving the central attributes distinctive of his Oriental origin;—these are the chief forms taken by that belief in a personal Devil which has obtained such continual acceptance as to entitle it to be called one of the cosmopolitan beliefs of mankind. For, in addition to the marked shapes given to it by the principal people represented in literature, every savage tribe has something rudely corresponding,—some horrid equivalent, before which they deprecatingly shudder,—some analogue of the diabolic personification.

It is the purpose of this article to discuss the foundations, not to exhibit the detailed history, of the belief in a personal Devil. Still, a bird's-eye view of the historic elements and development of the ecclesiastical doctrine of Satan may aid us in our survey. First,—after those pre-historic superstitions of the barbaric mind which have transmitted into the opinions of more rational times no philosophic formularies, only germinant influences,—we have the Persian personification of the principle of darkness, hate, and corruption. During the Jewish captivity at Babylon this was brought into connection with the Hebrew idea of Sheol, or a subterranean world of the ghosts of the dead. The result thus reached was subsequently, by Pharisaic and Cabalistic theorizings, developed into, or joined upon, a doctrine of the fall of man, and the incurring of death and the penal gloom of the lower realm of shades. These conclusions, still further complicated with the Oriental speculations concerning evil genii and the transmigration of souls, mixed with Platonic theories, the Greek and Roman notions of Pluto and Hades, Mors and Ere-

bus, seethed into a more composite mass of faith and fancy at Alexandria, and reacted on the Jewish mind at Jerusalem. From the vast confluence of ideas and beliefs which met in primitive Christianity, the materials pertaining to this particular, aggravated by a large infusion from the Manichæan heresy, were taken up and wrought out by the early Church fathers into the forensic scheme of perdition and redemption so familiar to the student of Christian theology;—namely, that Satan in the fall of Adam obtained the souls of all men as his prey; that Christ died to ransom them, descended and fought a victorious battle with the arch-enemy, broke the fatal spell by his resurrection, and established the rite of baptism as a redemptive seal, blotting out the diabolical mortgage. This exciting scheme of imaginative belief, wedded to the Gothic superstitions concerning magic and evil spirits, when Europe became Christianized produced the mediæval doctrine so pronounced and copious in romantic and ecclesiastic literature from the ninth century to the seventeenth. Since that time the portentous dogma has suffered badly from the shocks of science and philosophy, has been fading and lessening in the air and light of wholesome labor and common sense. Such are the chief *momenta* in the historic course of the faith in a personal Devil.

In view of this multifariousness of mode and this extended prevalence, we are, in the natural process of our minds, at once accosted by the questions, How did the belief in a Devil originate? What first suggested the idea of an impersonate Spirit of Evil? And what influences conspired to give that idea lodgment and seat, such a lofty throne and so tremendous a sceptre as we see it has had in the history of man? To answer these inquiries satisfactorily,—indeed, to give them any genuine answer, and not a mere verbal evasion,—a little philosophical explanation is necessary of the operations of the human mind in the formation of theories to account for the phenomena that greet it. The matter may appear somewhat obscure and difficult at first, but if the reader will have patience it will soon become clear.

The conscious experiences of man—his ideas, feelings, beliefs—depend on his being in relations with outward realities,



— with objects, appearances, events, other beings. He would be incapable of any experience were he not himself a force and susceptible to other forces. The realities, the forces and appearances, of the universe act on him, and he reacts on them. And thus — as far as our present object requires the analysis to be carried — his experience is made up. Now, different forces and appearances, different objects and events, act differently on him, in accordance with their varying natures. The crash of a thunderbolt affects him in one way, the song of a lark in another; the quality of honey in one way, that of wormwood in another. He also reacts upon things differently in response to their various effects upon him. He opens his breast to the bland sunshine and the cool breeze with confiding pleasure; he cowers and covers himself from the freezing tempest with disliking pain; he shrinks from the coiled rattlesnake's fang with horror. But not only does the human consciousness react upon things differently in accordance with their different qualities and relations to it; that reaction also varies, when the outward action is the same, according to the varying states of the man, the peculiarities of his constitution, his moods and whims, his transmitted tendencies and his education, his excitement or stupor, health or disease. Here, it will immediately be seen, a disturbing element of wide reach and fatal import is introduced, the workings of which we will now proceed to illustrate.

When everything is normal and harmonious, the action of realities upon us is in quantity and quality precisely proportionate to those realities, and conveys to us exact reports, deposits in us the truth, of those realities as they are, so far as we are concerned with them. For instance, under such circumstances, the rumble of a distant cart is recognized as the rumble of a distant cart, and not mistaken for rolling thunder; a tree-stump dim in the dusk is taken for an obscure tree-stump, and not supposed to be a bear. Furthermore, when everything is normal and harmonious, the reactions of our minds upon realities are precisely proportionate and concordant with the realities. Then the substance of our experience is truth, and its form is health; our organism is in perfect functional correspondence with its circumstantial

laws ; our life is a harmonized fruition of the medium in which, and the forces by which, it subsists. But when by any cause this happy normal equilibrium is broken, when, through organic disease or transitory perversity, discord is brought in, then a wild perturbation commences ; as far as it extends, all is flung out of its right relations and into confusion ; falsehood, deformity, delirium, begin to reign where truth, beauty, and reason had before governed.

Another form of statement, and the help of some illustrative specifications, may make this clearer. When the reactions of the mind are in exact accordance with the actions of the given objects, that is, with the phenomena presented to us, the results registered in memory as ideas and beliefs are precise mental equivalents of the facts ; they stand to us afterwards as perfect representatives of the facts. When the reactions of the mind, from want of energy and connection, are not up to equilibrium with the facts, then, partially subdued, baffled, it is full of unrest, anxiety, vague bewilderment, but ever repeats its attempts to grasp a solution of the problem, and will not be at peace until it has registered in the brain some formulary which, however inadequate to the facts, being all that it is adequate to, seems to it the genuine answer and equivalent. When the reactions of the mind, instead of just touching that equilibrium of consciousness with phenomena whereof truth is the balance-beam, and instead of swinging below it in that baffled suspense whose final deposit and poise is incompetent folly, vibrate high above it in consequence of an excess of uncoördinated energy or crude eagerness, the result is superstition, something aside from and additional to the truth ; the abnormal idea or belief then left in the brain to be used as the mental equivalent of the facts, is a monstrous exaggeration. For example, in the first instance, the idea in our mind of an oak-tree produces the same effects on our organism, only in a fainter degree, as the veritable tree when we stand before it. In the second instance, our idea of the tree is a dim, inadequate, forceless representation, a vague image of a fading branchy mass, incapable of producing its due effects. But in the third instance, our idea of the tree is so inordinately vivid as to produce more than the proper effects of the original itself ; the excess of

intensity registers itself in a surplus product, takes the stamp of our personality, adds to the arborescent form of wood a volitional spirit of life. Hence the faith in dryads. When the ancients undertook to explain the cause of the planetary movements, the task was too severe for them; baffled of the true explanation, they yet managed to satisfy, or at least to quiet, their prying minds by the somewhat arbitrary supposition that the planets were gods, serenely walking their skyey rounds. But when Sir Isaac Newton, aided by his great predecessors, and armed with the calculus, essayed the problem, his hypothesis of gravitation reached to equilibrium with the phenomena, was an accurate mental equivalent for the facts.

The human mind in all conditions—from the Digger Indians who burrow in the ground and eat vermin, to Plato and Leibnitz who geometrize the creative plan and gauge the contents of infinitude—will try to solve the great problems of nature and life. The character of the solutions attained will always depend much on the qualifications of the attempting mind. The operations of the savage mind in the purely barbaric state are simple and excited, instinctive and unreflective, to a degree scarcely intelligible to us. They knew very little of the complex and critical processes so familiar and so important to us,—the processes of inter-comparison whereby we are accustomed to neutralize mistakes and rectify conclusions so as to secure equilibrium with the standard of truth at last. Logical consistency, indispensable to us, is nothing to them, if the result only happen to appease the dominant impulse for the moment. Accordingly, in those early times and among those unscientific people where the germs of all great popular superstitions had their birth, the mind was quite at the mercy of caprice and fortuitous conditions for its beliefs. Scarcely any peculiarity of barbarous tribes is more marked than the astonishing predominance of the imaginative faculty in their mental constitution, their incapacity for an accurate discrimination of fact from fiction. The thought of the philosophic scholar goes back to a people and an age when such notions as are portrayed in the *Arabian Nights'* Entertainments and the *Tales of the Genii* were received with as implicit a faith as that now rendered to our books of chemistry and geography.



Under such circumstances, it is obvious how easily any dogmas of faith, however incongruous and frightful, might spring up and get admission. When the brains of men are in a chronic state of suspicion, pride, lust, wealth, hate, and terror, — motivated by the evil passions of savages, — of course their demoniacal reactions will eventually register in their memories a demoniacal set of ideas and beliefs. A crop of devils will spontaneously spring into being.

Bearing in recollection the preceding principles, we are prepared now to answer the question, How did the belief in a personal Devil originate? It is the perverse and inadequate solution of the problem of evil arrived at by crude and unbalanced minds. It is the result reached by the discordant reactions of unphilosophical and over-stimulated minds upon alarming objects and painful influences. An untrained mind, not fortified, restrained, and guided by logical discipline, at any startling representation losing its equilibrium with the facts, helps out its inadequate and baffled reaction by calling to its aid in the effort associated masses of its familiar experience, — or carries along with its mettlesome and excessive reaction a predominating mixture of its own elementary forms and passions, — and, spreading these from the known, of which they are the equivalents, over the unknown, takes them as the equivalents of that also. Thus we find the Norse hell cold and venomous, full of rocks and ice; the Greenland heaven abounding with whales, walruses, and birds, easy for hunters: but the hell of tropical countries full of fire and thirst, their heaven supplied with rosy bowers, marble fountains, and lovely hours.

The theory of a personal Devil arose just as the conceptions of all the other fabulous personages of the popular mythologies of the past arose; that is, from the perverted reactions of incompetent minds on the forces and appearances presented to them. Before science has classified the objects of the universe in orderly groups, and before philosophy has arranged the workings of things, the sequences of events, under general laws, the mind, unequipped with relevant lore and undirected by appropriate logic, of course must answer every inquiry that confronts and goads its curiosity according to the materials

and the forces it possesses, according to the data and the motives within itself. Men in such a state are conscious of the force wielded by their own wills. They know that they move by their own volition, and move other objects, and adapt means to ends, execute designs, do all sorts of things by their wills. This force of will impelled by thoughts, passions, love, hate, is the only force they immediately know, and this is made known to them by instantaneous and unequivocal consciousness. Under these circumstances, when they see objects with no life or force of their own moving and producing results, see all around them means adapted to ends, see innumerable designs of blessing and of ban, of beauty and of horror, wrought out in every part of the creation, and all this with no apparent cause, they instinctively attribute it all to beings like themselves, only invisible and more subtle and powerful, beings with thoughts, passions, and intentions, conscious wills. They must do so; there is no alternative; this is the only kind of cause they can conceive. Thus arises every sort of supernal and infernal personage entering into the fabric of the historic mythologies.

The primitive man, looking out over the world, contemplating alike its calm and beautiful phenomena and its portentous and frightful phenomena, the contrast and apparent conflict of sunshine and darkness, calm and tempest, summer and winter, devouring earthquake and blessing harvest,—looking out also over the mixed and contradictory ingredients of human life, its sacred prosperities and virtues, holy peace and joy, its dire convulsions of agony, crime, disease, madness, death,—no wonder he carries the only forces and motives known to him—intelligence, will, love, hate—up to the sightless causes of all this, and believes that conscious beings preside over every part, and recognizes in each blessing or calamity, each beauty or horror, a token of supernal favor or frown, an effect of benignity or malice. Whatever seemed lovely and beneficent was the work of a benevolent being, a good power, a god; while whatever seemed ugly and injurious was the work of a malevolent being, a bad power, a devil. In the tendency of the mind to group, co-ordinate, simplify its results, and at length to reach unity, the swarming throng of deities named in poly-

theism finally centre in the Supreme God of monotheism; and by the same process the crowd of demons are gradually collected into one crowning Devil. The correctness of this analysis and explanation is demonstrated by the history of mythology.

Let us sum up the conclusion thus far in a brief statement. The conception and spiritual form of a Devil are given in the disproportionate reaction of the mind on the portentous phenomena of nature and the painful sensations of the soul; and the *animus* or character is furnished by the involuntary *projection into that form*, by the believer, of his own passions when he does evil things. For example, he murders an enemy in hate and rage; afterwards, seeing a man struck dead by lightning, he attributes similar hate and rage to the personified cause and wielder of the lightning. There is such an amount of diabolism in men that we need not wonder how man has come to believe in a Devil. The devilish material in our breasts flings its shadows athwart every landscape of life, and those shadows naturally adumbrate in gigantesque the shapes of the beings who fling them. Were there no opaque mass of evil in us, we should perceive no Satanic shape of evil looming in the sombre spaces of nature; as stood there no man in the light on the mountain-peak, no spectre of the Brocken would be seen, afloat in the air, hovering in Titanic outline above the valley.

The conception of a colossal Devil, the personal embodiment of all wickedness and malice, being thus lodged in the mind as a solution of that problem of evil which is constantly confronting us in some form or other, is at length registered in the memory as a fixed belief, through the combined force of four secondary causes, which operate to strengthen, to spread, and to perpetuate it. First, it is fostered, in accordance with the law of habit, by the repetition of the act of belief on each recurrence of the problem it is imagined to solve. The oftener any mental act is performed, the deeper groove it wears for itself in the brain, the stronger grows the tendency of the nerve to repeat it, the more nearly the function approaches to spontaneous performance. Now, the idea of a Devil as the author of evil once admitted by a man, every time there is brought to his experience any manifestation of evil not otherwise obviously

explicable, any earthquake swallowing a village, conflagration of a city, fearful depression of spirit, ravaging pestilence, shocking outbreak of crime, any mysterious calamity or omen, instantly the image of a diabolic impersonation rises in his fancy in the relation of cause to effect, and by the repeated emergence of the idea in belief it grows deeper and vivid.

Secondly, such a belief acquires an increased diffusion and tenacity of hold from its striking convenience as a makeshift, or evasion of questions too profound and complicated for ready solution, and yet whose importunate presence and clamor must in some way be quieted before we can have peace. This is a deep and singular characteristic of the mind of man, that it must give some kind of a solution to every problem which strongly interests it. When it alights on an answer which calms its own restless reactions, it is content, no matter how utterly inadequate to the facts, how absurd in itself, that answer may be. Thus some of the ancients, wondering what was the nature and cause of the Milky Way, concluded that it was an old disused path of the sun, and that the gleaming strata of stars seen there were the splendid specks and dust still left on the deserted road from the burning chariot-wheels of the mighty traveller. A yet more emphatic instance is that of the poor Hindoo, who asked a Brahmin what the earth rested on. On the back of an elephant, was the reply. And what does the elephant stand on? On a huge tortoise. Ah, that is it, said the inquirer, perfectly satisfied. The reaction of his infantile mind reached no further, and of course he was quieted. Now no problem is more frequently presented to man than that of evil in some one of its endless shapes. No problem interests him more intensely. No problem, to the ordinary mind, is harder of real solution. Accordingly, it is easy to see how powerfully and how widely any plausible formula seeming to meet the exigency with promptness and with simplicity would recommend itself. Just that formula we have in the theory of a personal Devil. Does the inquiry, What makes yon eclipse, portentously darkening the sun at noon? What aroused the spirit of jealousy and pride between those two diplomatists or kings, and produced this war with all its sumless horrors?



Whence arise these fell emotions that tear my breast, these mystic misgivings that so unspeakably oppress my soul? Who engendered the hate that burst into that shocking murder? What could have induced that good man so strangely to forfeit his honor and become a despised renegade?—does any one of the ten thousand questions like these perplex and perturb a man? There is the *idée* of a ubiquitous personage, who, with limitless means and presence of power, works against God, interferes to mar and blast the beneficence of nature, plots to seduce the loyalty and undermine the happiness of man. This dire image lies ready at hand. It is so compact, so convenient, seems so nicely to fit the exigency, that the tentative reactions of the mind, groping about in anxious perturbation, spontaneously clasp it, shudder into repose, and for the time there is content.

In the third place, the belief in a personal Devil is immensely strengthened by the weight of authority. Sacred teachers, priestly guides, looked up to with docile awe, inculcate it as a dogma which must be accepted without criticism. It is announced as a fragment of revelation in holy books regarded with entire veneration. The great poets, like Dante and Milton, whose strains sink into the imaginations of the people,—the great vernacular authors, like Bunyan and Defoe, whose compositions are familiar as household words to the masses of men from the credulous days of their childhood,—all embody it in their works, and heap about it quantities of the most appalling, piquant, amusing stories, images, and myths, appealing with great power to the faculties of wonder and wit. There is scarcely any end to the narratives surcharged with all the fascinations of faith and fancy, fun and terror, narratives embodying accounts of the Devil's doings, and copiously circulated among all classes, fair specimens of which are "The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus," "The Terrible Story of the Mysterious Spaniard," "The True Narrative of the Devil and Tom Walker," "The Marvellous Tale of Peter Rugg, or the Missing Man," and "The Wild Huntsman of the Tyrol." Whole generations trembled at the accounts of the Walpurgis-night revels of witches and fiends on the Blocksberg. A rich storehouse of such legends

is the chapter on the Devil in Grimm's German Mythology.\* Thus the idea of the personage called Satan early acquires a familiar place in memory as an authoritative belief, tenaciously associated with whatever is venerable and commanding in the names of great authors, the pages of holy writ, the old voices of tradition, and the fresh announcements of the corporate Church.

The belief in a personal Devil has been fortified mightily by still another cause; namely, social habit, the gossip that fills the daily air, the epidemic contagiousness of fashion and conformity. The multitude of mankind no more work out their own beliefs, or decide the form of their own opinions, than they discover and arrange the scientific knowledge imparted in the schools, or determine the cut of the dresses they wear. They accept certain opinions because others accept them. They think, feel, talk, in a certain way, because previous generations have, and their neighbors do. In Arabia they wear turban and robes because their fathers wore turban and robes. In Europe they wear hat and pantaloons because their fathers wore hat and pantaloons. It is the same in the inner world of thought and faith. Doctrines rooted in the receptive imagination of bygone ages, handed down to the present with all the prestige of organized establishment, current profession, and observance, bear the same interior sway with the mass of society that fashion wields in external matters. It requires more independent earnestness of reflection and conscientious heroism of purpose than are usually furnished, for a man to break his moorings to the average custom and opinion, and openly reject a fundamental point of the public faith. It is natural, easy, comfortable; every lazy instinct, and every selfish instinct, and many a tender sympathy, too, prompt him to think as others think, hold by what is handed down and established, as others do. Conformity is one of the most pervasive powers of the world. He is a bold and strong man who does not

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\* Part III. of Grasse's *Bibliotheca Magica et Pneumatica*, "Lehre von Teufel," with the Appendix to it, gives the titles, with the places and dates of publication, of about a hundred and fifty volumes on this subject, in which the curious reader may find ample materials for entertainment and reflection. For instance, in 1750 John Melchior Krafft published at Hamburg "A detailed History of Exorcism, or the Conjurage of the Devil, by means of Infant-Baptism!"

yield to it. It requires a genius to leap out and defy it. For how many centuries the postulate of the central position of the earth, and the revolution of the sun around it, was universally taken for granted! He was an intellectual genius and hero of the highest order of audacity who first dared to assume the opposite opinion. So, in the faith of the besotted millions of the East, the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul seems imbedded with an organic inveteracy. So the whole air of Christendom, in the popular faith of the Middle Age, was loaded with the diabolic presence. The insane felt him in their ravings; the sleeping saw him in their dreams; the peasant shuddered at his fancied shadow in the forest; the baron started at his surmised whisper in the rustling arras; Pope Gregory often conversed with him in bodily presence; Martin Luther, long tormented by his disturbing visits, in a moment of hallucination flung his inkstand at him; even Melancthon threatened one of his pupils with a dungeon and chains if he dared to question the Satanic personality;—virtually all teachers taught, and all people credited, his being and his vast agency of ill. As late as the year 1797, a book was published in German, called “*The Invisible Observer, or Man and Devil in Company*,” based on the belief that Satan secretly accompanied men everywhere, watching a chance to get them into his power. The faith thus rooted we in a degree inherit. The theory of a personal Devil, accordingly, comes within the range of the tremendous power of conformity. It is so ostensibly prevalent now because it has been so really prevalent before, and because we are indoctrinated with it in every form of education, from the pointed application of picture, ballad, novel, epic, catechism, and sermon, to the immense saturation of social establishment and fashion.

We have now seen how the theory of a personal Devil originated, and how it has obtained such a wide prevalence in the belief of mankind. But a more important inquiry is, Does this theory embody a truth or a falsity? It is the result of an attempt to solve the problem of evil. Is it a correct or an erroneous solution of that problem? It is a baffled attempt, a falsity, a mental phantom, and no solution at all. Instead of answering the question, it simply removes the question one

step farther off, and wins a factitious peace for the mind, not by overcoming, but by eluding, the genuine problem. By the supposition of a Devil, it is plain that we evade, instead of explaining, the origin of evil; for then the Devil is the evil, and we ask how his existence is to be accounted for. To say the Devil is the cause of evil, and be content with that empty piece of verbal dexterity; is like asking what the elephant stands on, and being perfectly acquiescent with the oracular response, "The tortoise, you know!" Probed and provoked by the persistent demand, "Well, but what then supports the tortoise?" In other words, "If the Devil originates all evil, how did the Devil originate?" And attempts have been made at a reply. First, it is said that far back in the ancient periods of eternity, before "the wild time had begun to coin itself into calendar months and days," a great angelic leader rebelled against the Supreme, seduced a throng of his compeers to join him in his impious design, was hurled out of heaven with them, and became the arch-apostate of the universe. He gathered all bad spirits under his banner, moved down to the nether region of space, and there set up an empire of blackness, fire, and horror, the antitype and antagonism of heaven. Thence he emerges, and prowls abroad to execute all manner of mischief. Obviously there is nothing scientific or philosophic, nothing reasonable, coherent, and sober, in this scheme. It is a purely arbitrary freak of fancy, merely an attractive bit of poetry. It takes its rank at once with the other striking fragments of mythology,—Scandinavian Hela and Nastroud, Persian Ahriman and Dutzak. The irrationality, the futile irrelevance of it as a representation of truth, appear herein, that it starts with the object of quest in its hand, and ends just where it began. Seeking the origin of evil, it says the Devil is the cause of it. Then, seeking the origin of the Devil, it says, Evil, pre-existing, led him to rebel and fall, and thus become the Devil. An absurd medley,—fair material for imaginative attraction and poetic handling, but the opprobrium of reason and the scoff of logic. The other answer which has been offered is, that the Devil never originated at all, but is the uncreated, everlasting Principle of Evil, the nadir of that infinite pole of being whereof the zenith



is God. Is not this likewise an arbitrary conceit of the speculative faculty,—a reaction of the mind into the abyss of fantasy, upon no correspondent reality? It is like Shakespeare's "dagger of the mind, a false creation" resulting from the abnormal reaction of an oppressed brain. Who can possibly know any such thing? And it cannot be pretended that any such proposition has been given by revelation, and is in the Bible. What text of Scripture affirms the existence of an uncreated and everlasting Devil? It is a wild leap of the imagination. It contradicts the infinity and omnipotence of God, thus to give him a co-eternal opponent and invincible negation. In fact, the origination of the theory of a personal Devil is not so much to be accounted for as a conscious attempt at the explanation of evil, but rather on that principle of reverberation and symmetry which has played so cryptic, yet important, a part in the formation of mythologic opinion. The mind, whenever it sees or imagines anything on one side, by a profound instinct spontaneously demands a correspondence or equivalent on the other side, and is distressed if the missing proportion and balance be not furnished. Thus hell is an infernal echo in the pit of what heaven is the celestial opposite to in the sky, and the idea of Satan is the inverted and antithetic reflection of the idea of God. In the Middle Age this was partially recognized, and in one of the favorite forms in which the Devil appears in the mediæval legends, he is consciously represented as a parody of God. He even has a mother who diabolically mimics the Virgin Mary. Dillherrus published, at Nuremberg, in 1640, a book called "The Devil the Ape of God,"—*Dei Simia Diabolus*.

The fatal refutation of the hypothesis in question is, that it has no supporting basis, hangs on the air of wilful assertion. There is no evidence, not a scrap or hint, of the existence of such a being. There are no traces of positive and designed evil in the creation,—pure evil as such. All evil is the limitation or the perversion of good, a necessary condition and accompaniment of a finite system of things progressing towards perfection. There must be an adequate force or cause that produced and sustains and governs the universe; and so we cannot avoid the theory of a God. But since all evil can

be accounted for by the necessary limitations of good in the complicated changes and contingencies of a finite world, there is no need of the theory of a Devil, no room for it. It is wholly gratuitous. A special illustration may set the justice of this view in a clearer light. We behold a nail-machine in operation, rattling out a hundred nails a minute. In trying to account for that machine, we cannot avoid the supposition of a man of inventive genius. But we do not need to suppose another man opposed to the former, to account for the friction and clatter, wear and tear, of the machine. These are the accompaniment of its operation. So, while we must suppose a God to account for the universe, we need not suppose a Devil to account for evil, or the friction in the working scheme of the universe. Nearly all the greatest thinkers in the history of philosophy have agreed with Plato and Augustine, that evil is a privative condition, not anything positive,—a negation, not a substance,—a defect, not an end. Limitation is the true Devil. To quote from Epictetus, “As a mark is not set up in order that the aim may be missed, so neither does the nature of evil exist in the world.”

Evil, then, is not the positive work of a Satanic personage, but a limiting accompaniment of the plan of the creation, an inevitable part in that plan. Why some different plan was not adopted, it is beyond our power to know. But the plan being such as it is, evil is unavoidable. For instance, we look on death and its concomitants as a part of the evil in the world; but if death were taken away, there could be no succession of new generations,—and that would imply a fundamentally different plan of life from the present. If man has freedom of thought, error must be possible to him as well as truth. If he has the power to stretch out his hand to lift a fallen brother, he must have the power to raise it to strike him down. If he can taste of sweetness, he must be able to taste of bitterness. If love and peace be possible to him, hate and wrath must be; if industry and honesty, then laziness and theft. These opposites imply each other. They are the essential condition of the noble destiny of free self-direction and virtue. Certainly no Devil is required to explain all this, or any of it. In fact, the supposition of a Devil, in

relation to any of the phenomena of evil, is not an interpretation of the facts, but *an addition to the facts*. For example, a volcano suddenly vomits a deluge of lava over a vineyard, drowning the neighboring population, and blasting the region into desolation. The fact is explained by physical laws. The theory of a Devil only adds an extraneous and artificial element to them. When we use the term explanation, we do not of course mean to imply the removal of all mystery, but only the removal of confusion of fact and perplexity of mind. We are not able absolutely to explain anything. On every side we come at last to an unfathomable abyss. The difference between what we call unexplained and explained phenomena is this. The former show us *confusion* based in mystery; the latter show us *order* based in mystery. Both are equally swathed and enveloped in mystery; but those wear the aspect of confusion, these of order; and we are so constituted that confusion distresses the mind, while order satisfies it. Apprehending phenomena with unperceived connections, we wrestle in uncertainty; but understanding the connections, we rest in content. And thus it comes that, in the historic evolution of mythological belief, confusion, wherever dispersed in the universe, is the nebulous halo of Satan; but order, wherever discerned, is the starry crown of God.

There is an apparently chaotic mystery in the origination of our impulses, emotions, thoughts. We seem to lie in passive waiting, whilst sensations, intellections, and the various other states of consciousness, follow each other across the psychological stage without our effort. Whence do they come, and how? Swedenborg accounts for all our experiences, good and bad, by the theory of an influx of angelic or demoniac spirits from the heavens and the hells. Do we hate, lie, steal, kill? Infernal spirits are possessing and actuating us. And the contrary results are produced by celestial spirits. Such a representation may recommend itself as seeming to be easier, more definite and tangible, than any other hypothesis; but in reality it complicates and eludes, instead of simplifying or solving, the problem. If we do not account for these things as products of our own organization, in its working correlations with the universe, we do not really account for them at all;

because, if our feelings, thoughts, and deeds are infusions of disembodied spirits, the same old question, merely at one remove farther off, still meets us, and demands whence and how arise the feelings, thoughts, and deeds of these *spirits*. And then, besides, we are confronted with the additional query as to how these spirits are able to interpenetrate us and enact their wishes through us. It is much more in consonance with reason and nature to suppose the original genesis and birth of our various experiences in ourselves immediately in correspondence with the operative forces and phenomena of the environing world. There is no need of palming off our wicked propensities on any diabolic personage. Goethe said, "I have never heard of any crime which I might not have committed." Lady Macbeth, in unhallowed soliloquy, purposing the murder of Duncan, with the true mythologic animus, breaks into the horrid invocation:—

"Come, come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here;  
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full  
Of direst-cruelty! . . . . Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief!"

She might have made much shorter and more rational work of it by conjuring her own devilish impulses, and have let alone the needless conception of foreign workers of a mischief altogether of her own domestic manufacture. A matter is explained, as far as we are able to explain anything, when its phenomena are grouped under an intelligible law, or arranged in a regular order of coexistences and sequences. Now, this may be done, in regard to our experience of personal evil, by studying the operations of our mental organization, as we have seen, much better without than with the supposition of an extraneous spirit of evil. The theory of a personal Devil, therefore, we conclude from the whole survey, is a mistake. There is no such being. The only conception of a Devil which can stand the tests of philosophical investigation is the totality of limiting conditions inhering in a system of finite things and powers, an evil possibility hovering beside God



from eternity, waiting to become real the moment the fact of creation gives it opportunity.

But, some reader may ask, accepting this view, what are we to do with those words of Jesus, and those declarations of Scripture in general, which represent the Devil as a lying and malignant personality, an actual individual, with a will of wickedness antagonistic to the purposes of God and the welfare of men? We shall not pause to discuss this extensive question in detail, but merely set down the results of the most thorough investigation it has been in our power to make. In the first place, we admit that the actual existence of such a diabolic personage as has since been embodied in the popular creed of the Church is taught in the New Testament. It seems to us impossible to evade this conclusion without the most arbitrary perversion of the plainest language. The New-Testament writers, as on some other matters, so concerning demoniacal possessions, Beelzebub, Satan, entertained the common notions of their contemporary countrymen. And they report Jesus as cherishing and inculcating the same convictions.

Now Jesus himself may really have believed and expressed these doctrines, or his hearers may have misunderstood and inaccurately reported him, giving a concrete and literal significance to what he intended in an abstract and metaphorical sense. Teachers of the loftiest order and most advanced position are almost always subjected to this honest misrepresentation on the part of reporting auditors so far below their level, and so inadequately prepared to grasp and restate new and finer ideas. If Jesus used language implying the existence of a personal Devil, it does not, in our regard, derogate anything from the genuine rank and authority of the mission given him by God. For we do not conceive that that mission made him the bearer from heaven of an infallible set of intellectual instructions, but the impersonate and distributing medium of a regenerative energy, — a divine force of spirit to purge humanity of evil and consecrate it with holiness and love, to build up in men a new type of character, representing the image and mirroring the attributes of God. In such a mission, absolute correctness of dogmatic conception need be no part.

But while our Christian faith would not be disturbed in the least by such an interpretation of the language of Jesus, several considerations strongly incline us to think that he did not accept the vulgar notion of the personality of Satan. It seems to us out of keeping with the purity and elevation of other portions of his faith, unworthy of his genius and incongruous with it, irreconcilable with the wonderful penetration and the sublime harmony of his principal declarations. This view was long ago maintained by such profound thinkers, learned theologians, and consummate critics as Semler, Spinoza, Schleiermacher, Röhr, Wegscheider. Unquestionably, he employed on many occasions various current phrases in an interior and sublimated sense, far different from the low, coarse sense in which they were currently used by his hearers. For instance, by the word Messiah, the phrase "kingdom of heaven," the words baptism, regeneration, he denoted ideas of a far profounder and more spiritual import than was commonly understood by his contemporaries. So, in the matter immediately before us, it is undeniable that he sometimes used the language popularly taken as implying his belief in a personal Devil in a figurative manner, dropping all regard to the tangible form and dress, intending merely the spiritual significance. Thus, when the seventy disciples returned and reported their great success, he exclaimed, as in a prophetic rapture, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Again, he addressed to Peter, in presence of the other Apostles, the very same words he is said to have uttered to the Devil in the desert, "Satan, get thee behind me!" Now, if Jesus used the term metaphorically in some instances, he may have used it so in every instance. We think he did. But in some cases its figurativeness was so clear that none could escape perceiving it. In other cases his auditors and reporters caught their own beliefs from his tones, and put the cast of their own literality on his freer words. Instead of interpreting the language just cited from him with dogmatic narrowness, as containing a temporary Jewish figment, we think it should be explained with the broad flexibility which characterized his mind, extracting essential and eternal truth from every phenomenon of experience. Thus considered, it yields a moral lesson penetrating and sublime, exhorting us to say

to everything that would corrupt or mislead, "Get thee behind me"; not to yield, not to flee, not to stand looking and tampering, but with resolute firmness, and faith uplifted to God, instantly exclaim to every tempter who would seduce or detain us from duty, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" The Devil, taken as a metaphor, is the personification of all that is false, impure, destructive, opposed to the will of God. So we personify an endless number of individuals and particulars in one totality when we say, "Sober England teaches her sister nations a noble lesson of carefully guarded progress in constitutional liberty." In the same mental process by which we say, "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other," we gather all limiting conditions of good, all temptations to evil, in one grasp of thought, and personify the whole as Satan. It is an artifice of the mind, when the multiplicity of related materials is such as threatens to bewilder and baffle, to group and condense it into a unit, and name it with one symbolic word. It is then surveyed and handled with rapidity and ease. Then the mind, unless guarded by critical thought, is in danger of coming, through vague processes, to contemplate the entire material thus gathered and named as a concrete being, and not as a collective abstraction. Thus, sometimes what began as free poetic fancy ends as consolidated dogmatic belief. But in such cases—among which is to be reckoned the theory of a personal Devil—there is no more justifying ground for a literal accrediting of correspondent existences, than there is for looking on Fortune, with her cup and ball, as a real being.

The belief whose superstitious origin and spurious supports we have been examining, is one of the most obstinate of the errors of the early time which still linger with us, the children of a wiser and happier period. It too, however, like its congeners, must die. It must disappear as a mist dispersed by the breeze of rising intelligence. What horrid superstitions, now forgot, once held tyrannic sway in the savage state of humanity. Think of that custom, prevalent as late as the classic epoch, of burying persons alive under every important building, to appease the *genius loci*, the demon of the place, that he might not overthrow the structure: an instance of which is given in the Bible, in the sixteenth chapter of the First Book of

Kings, where it is related that Hiel, the rebuilders of Jericho, "laid the foundation thereof in Abiram, his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son, Segub." Tidings came to us not long since that a powerful chief in Central Africa, his sable majesty, the king of Dahomey, was about to celebrate the death of his father, the late king of Gezo, in accordance with a time-honored custom, by sacrificing two thousand human victims upon his grave, accumulating their blood in a pit until it was deep enough to float a canoe! The fact is a red jet of horror suddenly spiriting through the superimposed strata of civilized usage, sentiment, and law, from the core of a barbaric past. It leaps up in a spire of blood and flame, a terrific vestige of what in most races has long been extinct; as here and there the lurid tongue of a volcano still speaks to us of the time when all the world was fire.

In the slow, incessant progress of discovery and enlightenment, as province after province has been brought within the obvious domain of divine laws, how the sphere of supposed diabolic agency has been steadily narrowed! Once the production of all storms, earthquakes, floods, pestilences, wars, murders, disease, death,—every range and realm of sin and discord, violence and misery,—was ascribed directly to the Devil, without the least hesitation. Little by little doubts crept in, little by little wiser views were adopted, and little by little the infernal dogma faded from the foreground and began to disintegrate in the background. Emancipated research into the facts of the world, and adequate synthesis of their order, totally ignore the idea of Satan. Scientists and philosophers smile at it, or turn away in scorn; only the priests hold to it, and even they less and less. Enlightened reason and faith have long since excluded it from the sphere of nature, only superstitious ignorance and traditional conformity to the past still cling to it in the sphere of morals. But the theologians themselves are loosening their hold on it. One after another of the more advanced, even within the "orthodox" sects, openly disavows it; as Dr. Bushnell, who, in his remarkable work on "Nature and the Supernatural," says: "Satan or the Devil is not a bad omnipresence over against God,—that is a monstrous and horrible conception,—



but an outbreking evil, or empire of evil, in created spirits. It is not the name of any particular person, but a name taken up by the imagination to designate, in a conception the mind can most easily wield, the total of bad minds and powers." By and by, in a more rational and a less slavish age, all the world will combine to say to the outworn and rejected theory of a personal Devil, "*Get thee behind me!*"

Already, to an extent quite remarkable under the circumstances, the expression of this antique doctrine has ceased to imply any genuine belief in it, and has become a merely verbal form, an unmeaning acquiescence. It has passed up from solid existence as a dogma into aeriform existence as a trope. Not in one instance out of a hundred where the phrase is now used does it denote any clear faith. It is simply a metaphor of convenience, an artifice whereby the mind works off its excitement, without signifying the slightest deliberate belief. The immense disparity between the former condition of intellectual conviction and the present condition of imaginative habit may be seen in the contrast of two examples. Luther believed the Church proposition of a Devil so vividly, that, whenever he had any experience of evil, it immediately took the form of a proof of that proposition. His whole experience of evil was cast into the shape of an ever-recurring verification of his belief in Satan.\* When Edmund Kean played Shylock in London, on a certain occasion, he expressed in his tones and eyes such a demoniacal intensity of hate and revenge, that a man in the audience started up in terror, and cried, "It is the Devil!" In the former we recognize thorough sincerity of belief, a deliberate decision of the biassed judgment. In the latter, an instinctive start into a convenient metaphor, a sudden vent of the impassioned fancy. The difference is broadly characteristic of the two periods. Civilization brings men to live more in the light, in comfort, in regularity, in law. They thus avoid the startling shocks so abundant in the irregular ways, in the rustling and teeming darkness, of rude and ignorant ages. The trite displaces the

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\* See in Fraser's Magazine, December, 1844, a very interesting and instructive article, by Professor Masson, entitled, "The Three Devils; Milton's, Goethe's, Luther's."

terrific. And as the feeding stimulus to the faith in a personal Devil diminishes, naturally the faith itself shrivels and pales.

Nor let us fear any ill from the inevitable dying out of this long popular belief. Rather let us anticipate great and lasting good from the decease of so portentous a superstition. The loss of that horned and hooped impersonation of malignity will certainly not leave the universe in orphanage. Other errors, once thought vital parts of life and religion, have gone with good result. So will this. True, the denial of this pervasive dogma goes pretty far, and shakes the compact body of fancies built up into the fashionable scheme of faith. With the departure of the Satanic personality, the myth of Eden goes. And with that much else also. But it is only mythology that is shattered, not religion; only the products of abnormal fancy that are lost, not the conclusions of veracious experience, healthy insight, and sound reasoning. And happy the man who, amid the shock of shifting opinions, can quietly let old errors go, yet keep his faith in God and good serene and whole. The rock is not removed when the mist that enveloped it vanishes. When the rainbow over the waterfall fades, the torrent stays. Let us not, then, be alarmed because the grotesque defacements of falsehood peel and crumble, because the tinsel tracery-work of superstition perishes and drops from the adamantine fabric of theological truth. That structure will only stand so much the firmer and lovelier, — the superfluous mistakes and stains that marred and discolored it being removed, — the glory of its inherent strength and symmetry more sharply defined.



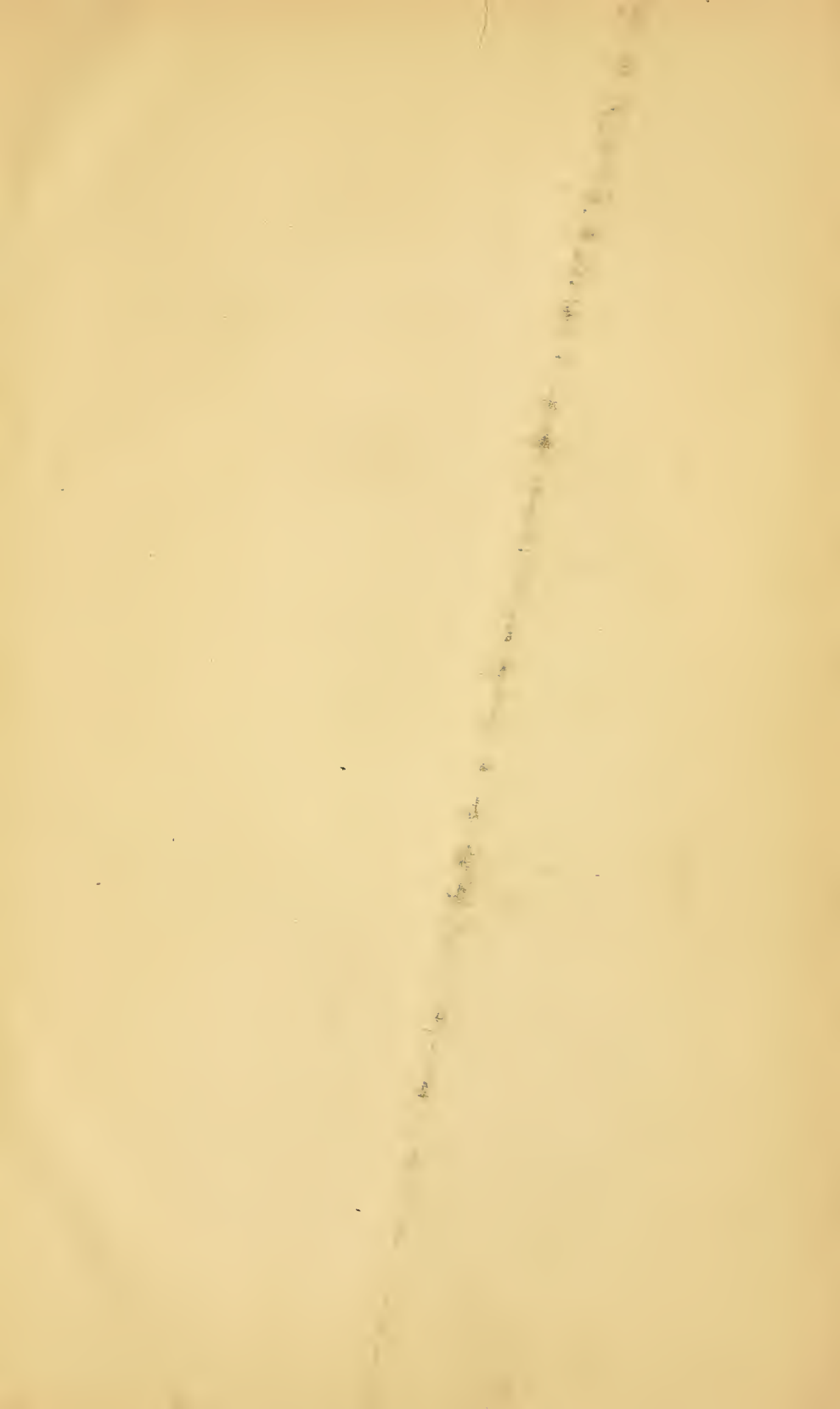
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